A Textbook of the Satsang Examinations Series: 3

YOGIJI MAHARAJ

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Translation: BAPS Sadhus

Swaminarayan Aksharpith
Ahmedabad

(English Edition)

(A short biography of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj)

A textbook for the Satsang Examinations curriculum set by Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha

Inspirer: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

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BLESSINGS

The youth movement established and nourished by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj has been expanding at a very rapid pace. With a view to satisfying the aspirations and the thirst for knowledge of the youth joining the organization, and also to enable them to understand and imbibe the principles of Akshar and Purushottam expounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the publications division, Swaminarayan Aksharpith, organized under the auspices of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, has produced a series of books.

Through these books, it is intended to impart systematic, sustained and pure knowledge in simple language on a scholastic basis to children and youth of the Swaminarayan Sampraday. It is hoped that this Sanstha, established by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj for implementing and propagating the Vedic ideals propounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, will, through this activity, spread the ideals and noble traditions of the Sampraday and through it, the culture and heritage of the Hindu religion.

It is the aim of this project to preach and spread the divine message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to all corners of the world. We hope that all religious-minded truth-seekers of the Sampraday, and those outside of it, will welcome this activity and be inspired by its universal principles and ideals.

In order to encourage children and youths, annual examinations are held based on the curriculum presented in these books. Certificates are also awarded to successful candidates. We bless Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Prof. Rameshbhai Dave, Kishorebhai Dave, and all others who have cooperated in preparing these books.

Vasant Panchmi
Vikram Samvat 2028
(1972 CE), Atladra

Shastri Narayanswarupdasji
(Pramukh Swami Maharaj)
Jai Swaminarayan

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This book is a biography of the divine personality that inspired us to frame this course of study. That person was none other than Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj, who pioneered two organizations – one for young children and one for youths. This is the life-story of Yogiji Maharaj, who encouraged children and youths to lead a pure, moral life and ascend the spiritual ladder.

For the benefit of the youths and children, the inspiring life-story of Yogiji Maharaj is given here in abridged form. The book is written in a simple and lucid style so that the young and old alike can enjoy it and benefit by it. The book is comprehensive since it describes all the important events from the life of Yogiji Maharaj – right from his birth to his last days, his life's work, his inspiring personality and his eloquent preachings.

The present publication is a translation of the Gujarati book *Yogiji Maharaj*. The book has been designed to serve as part of the curriculum for the Satsang Prarambha Examinations. It is our earnest prayer that all devotees and aspirants for knowledge will study these books carefully and pass the examinations with flying colours and, above all, derive immense spiritual benefit and earn the blessings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and our beloved guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

- Swaminarayan Aksharpith

Shri Swaminarayano Vijayate



*Ame sau Swāminā bālak, marishu Swāmine māte;
Ame sau Shrijitanā yuvak, ladishu Shrijine māte...

Nathi dartā nathi kartā, amārā jānni parvā;
Amāre dar nathi koino, ame janmyā chhie marvā...ame 1

Ame ā yagna ārambhyo, balidāno ame daishu;
Amārā Akshar Purushottam, Gunātit jnānne gāishu...ame 2

Ame sau Shriji tanā putro, Akshare vās amāro chhe;
Svadharmi bhasma choli to, amāre kshobh shāno chhe...ame 3

Juo sau motinā Swāmi, na rākhi kai te khāmi;
Pragat Purushottam pāmi, malyā Gunātit Swāmi...ame 4

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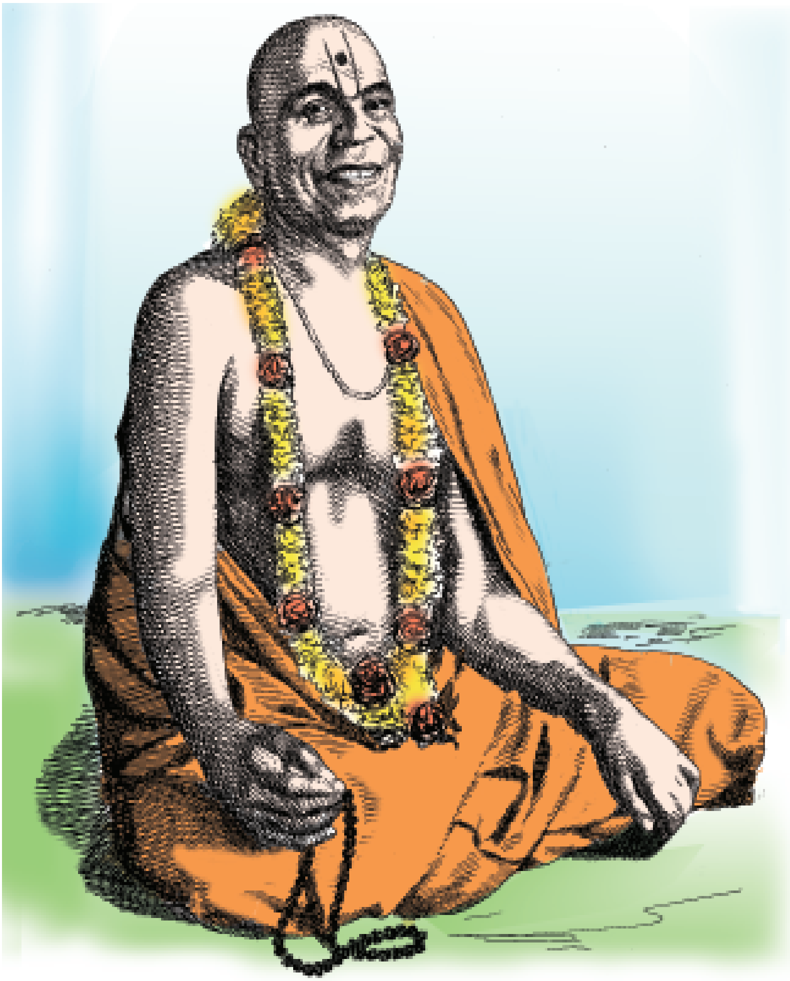
* For meaning see page 59

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YOGIJI MAHARAJ



Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj

1 BIRTH OF JINABHAI

In the small town of Dhari in the Amreli District of Saurashtra there lived a devotee by the name of Devchandbhai Vasanji of the Lohana community. Jethabhai, the grandfather of Devchandbhai, was a blessed devotee of Shriji Maharaj.

Yogiji Maharaj, the son of Devchandbhai, was born in Dhari on 23 May 1892 (Vaishakh *vad* 12, V.S. 1948). His mother's name was Puribai. His childhood name was Jinabhai, but his parents lovingly called him 'Jina'. Jina was loved by everyone. All were captivated by his handsome, shining face.

When Jina was a child, his mother took him with her to the cotton farm every day. Other women of the village who came to pluck cotton also brought their children with them. The women would leave their



"Why do you bring your wailing children to my farm?"

children under the shade of a tree, before commencing their work in the fields. Sometimes their children, failing to see their mothers, would cry loudly. This infuriated the farm owner. He scolded the women daily, "Why do you bring your wailing children to my farm?"

The farmer, however, never became angry with Jina's mother. Looking at Jina, the owner always remarked, "Jina is a miracle child. Look, he always sucks his toe, just as Shri Krishna did. Puribai, one day everybody will fall at his feet. They will worship him."

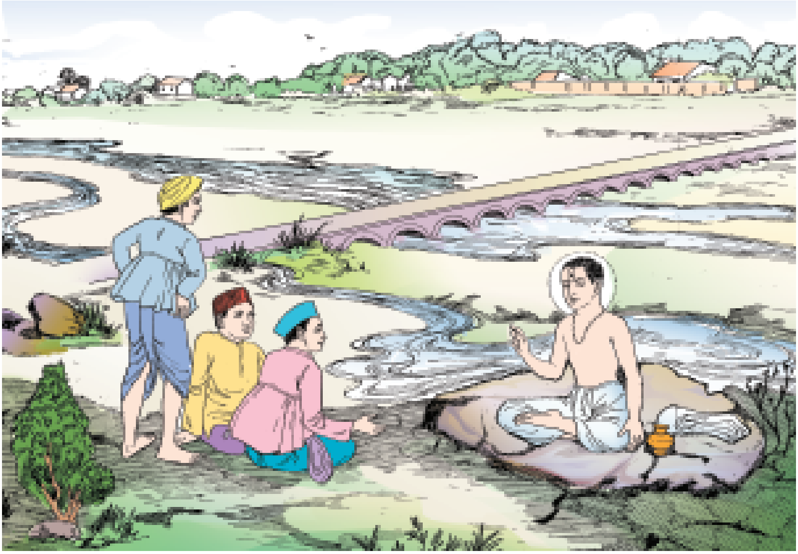
Gradually, Jina grew up and he was popularly called Jinabhai. Jinabhai, though young, had a strong liking for simplicity and cleanliness. He enjoyed nothing more than to engage in bhakti and singing bhajans.

2 JINABHAI IN MEDITATION

There is a confluence of three rivers on the outskirts of Dhari. The place of confluence is known as Triveni Sangam, and the resulting river is called the river Shetrunji. The Shetrunji narrows on reaching a bridge, and shrinks to the size of a small rivulet under the bridge. The inhabitants of Dhari call it Patalio Jharo.

Jinabhai used to have his daily morning bath at this spot near the bridge. He would wear clean clothes after his bath and then sit in an upright posture and perform meditation for hours together. He meditated upon the divine form of Shriji Maharaj. To the many who saw Jinabhai seated in meditation at such a lonely place, it seemed as if Dhruv himself was meditating! They invariably stood and watched the young Jina engrossed in meditation.

Sometimes, friends of Jinabhai would come to have their bath at Patalio Jharo. They were amazed to find Jinabhai rapt in meditation. They would wait for him till



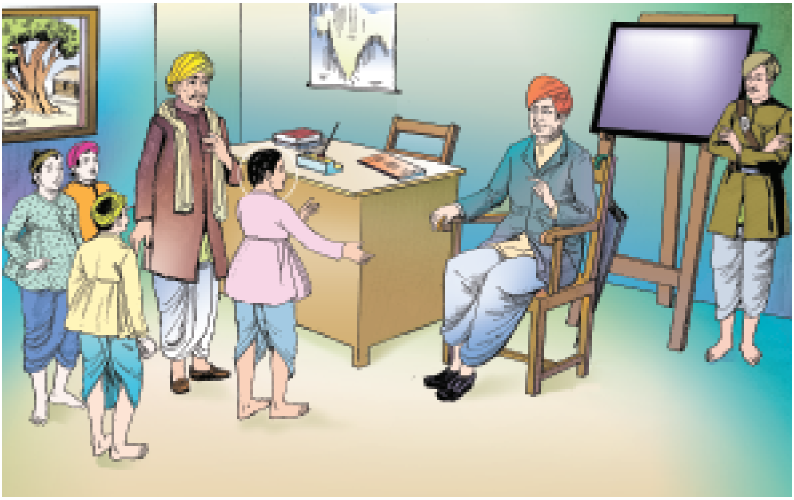
Jinabhai teaches meditation to his friends

he came out of his meditation and then enquire, "What were you doing?" And Jinabhai would reply, "I was remembering God. You also sit with me to meditate. I will teach you how to meditate."

From his childhood Jinabhai never failed to do his meditation every morning. He advised everybody to start their daily work only after remembering Shriji Maharaj.

3 JINABHAI'S COURAGE

Jinabhai was studying in the fifth standard. Tribhovandas was the headmaster of his school. He was a very hot-tempered man. One day, Tribhovandas severely thrashed a boy named Chandu. Jinabhai could not bear to see the boy suffer. He felt pity for Chandu, who was innocent of any wrongdoing. Jinabhai started chanting 'Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan'. Chandu screamed with pain. Tribhovandas continued thrashing him until he fell down unconscious. The children ran



"Our headmaster mercilessly beat the innocent Chandu."

helter-skelter out of fear of the teacher. Later, Chandu died as a result of the severe beating. Chandu's father reported the case to the inspector, and an inquiry was opened. The inspector came to the school to investigate. But who would dare to bear witness against the headmaster?

The inspector asked all the students in the class. But who would be bold enough to report the truth? Jinabhai always spoke the truth. Why be afraid of speaking the truth? Jinabhai was not at all afraid of the headmaster. So, he boldly addressed the inspector, "Our headmaster mercilessly beat the innocent Chandu. He grabbed him by the arm and bashed him to the ground."

When Jinabhai spoke up, all the other students gained courage and shouted with one voice, "Yes sir, it was the headmaster who beat Chandu." Looking closely at the forehead of Jinabhai, the inspector saw the holy *tilak-chandlo* mark. Innocence and honesty were written on Jina's face. He believed Jinabhai and immediately

dismissed the headmaster. He also rewarded Jinabhai with a prize for fearlessly speaking the truth.

The truthful always triumph. Therefore we should not be afraid of telling the truth. We should form a habit of speaking the truth from early childhood.

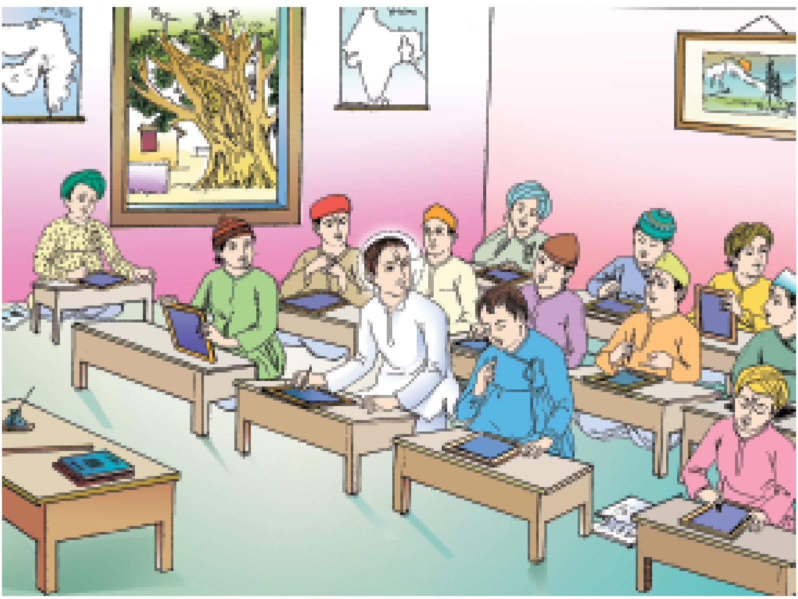
4 AN IDEAL STUDENT

Jinabhai was very clever in his studies. He always stood first in every class and won many prizes.

Sometimes dull or lazy students would sit beside Jinabhai, hoping to copy his answers. Some bullies would threaten Jina, "When you have solved all the questions you had better tell us the answers."

Jina would laugh and, to merely please them, say, "Alright, I will tell you. I will tilt my slate so that you can see everything I have written."

Whenever the teacher set any problem, Jinabhai



"By copying you are cheating God."

would solve it immediately, and then turn his slate upside down. Those around him who had neglected their previous lessons, would ask in a whisper, "What is the answer?" But Jinabhai would remain silent.

One day some of the boys threatened him, "Jina, show us your slate, otherwise we will beat you up."

But Jina fearlessly replied and explained, "You work it out! If my answer is wrong, then your answer will also be wrong."

Whenever other students succeeded in copying his work, Jinabhai did not like it. He would tell them off, "It is wrong to copy. By copying you are cheating God."

Thus, Jinabhai always insisted that everyone should learn by working hard, and should not cheat.

5 USE OF LEISURE TIME

At two o'clock in the afternoon there was a 30 minute recess for the class. During this time the students played games like *kho-kho,* hide and seek, chase and catch, and *amli-pipli*. Jinabhai was not interested in playing games. He preferred to spend his time in prayer. So, while his friends and other children played games, Jinabhai prayed to God in a quiet corner or under a tree.

The boys often wondered, "What is Jina doing?" The teachers, too, would ask his friends, "What does Jina do while others play?"

One day, two teachers saw Jina while he was meditating under a tree and asked, "Jina, you don't play any games. You meditate on God all day. You are not interested in the affairs of this world, so why don't you become a sadhu?"

"Yes, I will become a sadhu," replied a determined Jina. So saying, he resumed his prayers. How could the teachers of Jinabhai know at the time that Jinabhai



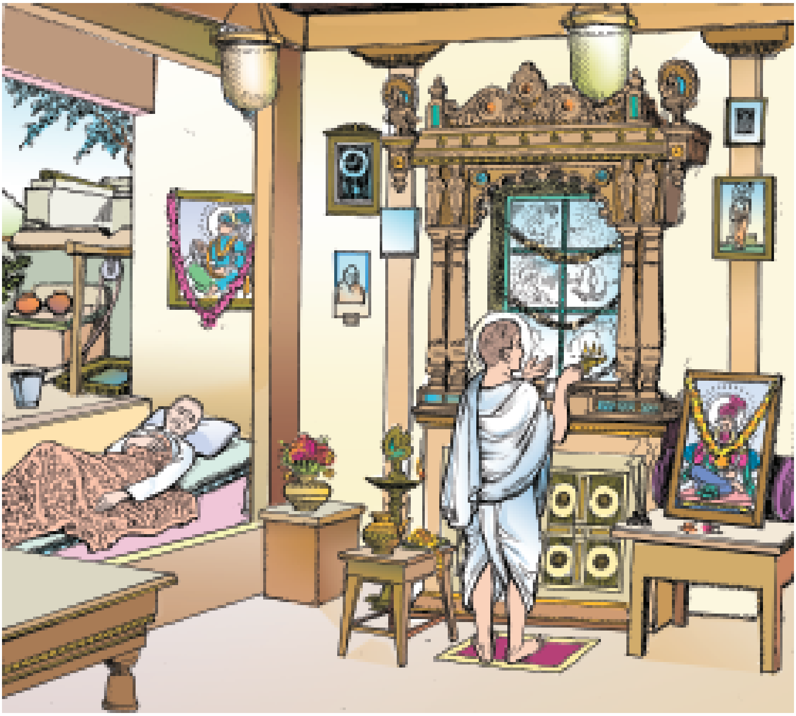
Whilst his friends played, Jina preferred to meditate on God

would really become a sadhu and become famous throughout the world.

Jinabhai did not like to waste his free time. He only liked to offer worship. We, too, should not waste time and should offer devotion to God.

6 WORSHIP OF THE LORD

For many years Jinabhai's uncle, Mohanbhai, had been performing the daily worship and service of the *murtis* in the mandir at Dhari. But due to old age and ill health, he could no longer look after the mandir properly. He thought, "It would be nice if some good devotee could be found to perform this service." His eyes fell on Jinabhai.



Jinabhai performing arti in the mandir

He asked Jinabhai if he would take up the mandir duties. Jinabhai was overjoyed, and assured him, “Mohankaka, do not worry, I will serve Thakorji.”

From that day Jinabhai assumed the mandir responsibilities, and engaged himself in the service of God. He would bathe the *murtis* lovingly, apply sandalwood paste and a kumkum *chandlo*, light the *divo* and incense sticks and perform the *arti*. His heart overflowed with joy while offering devotion to God.

Besides all this, he would draw water from the well and water the plants in the compound of the mandir. Within a short time the garden in the mandir was filled with the sweet fragrance of flowers. Every morning Jinabhai made garlands of flowers of various colours for the *murtis*. He would prepare a variety of delicacies to offer to God. He would serve the *murtis* as if God himself was physically present. Quite often, he even conversed with the *murti*.

In the mornings and evenings, he would bring his friends to the mandir. There, he taught them how to chant the ‘Swaminarayan’ mantra. He used to sing bhajans and asked others to sing with him. He taught them how to perform *arti* and also how to sprostrate before the *murtis*. Before they left he would give them *prasad*.

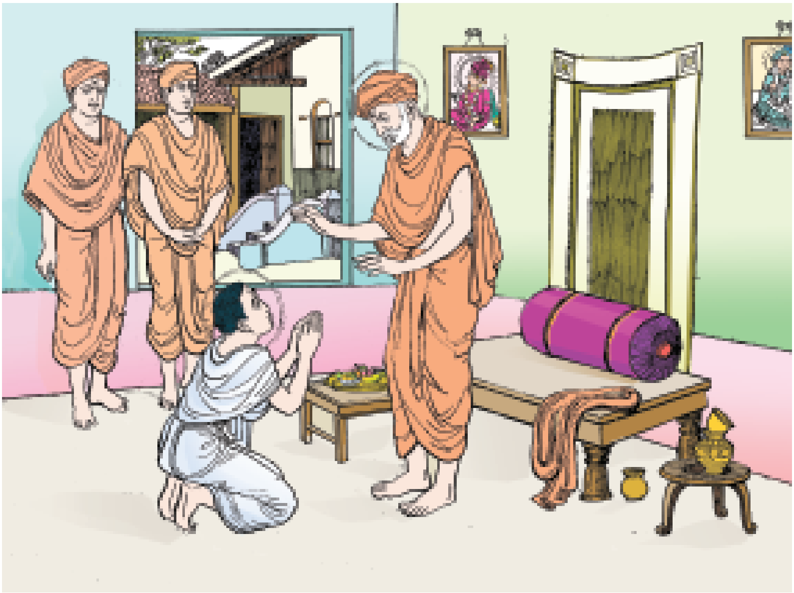
7 INITIATE ME AS A SADHU

Now Jinabhai passed his days and nights in the mandir. He worshipped Maharaj with single-minded devotion. Jina would also serve visiting sadhus during their short stays in Dhari. All of them were pleased with his service and would bless him. At school, Jinabhai passed the Standard VII exams. At that time, Krishnacharandas Swami, along with his group of sadhus visited Dhari from Junagadh. On seeing the sadhus, Jinabhai was extremely pleased. He was in their

service from early morning till late night. He would get up early in the morning and have his bath. After completing his morning prayers he would attend to the needs of the sadhus. He helped them by drawing water from the well for their bath. He would sweep the mandir floor, and neatly arrange the mats for the sadhus to sit and meditate upon. He lovingly served them all throughout the day.

Sadguru Krishnacharandas Swami was a blessed disciple of Gunatitanand Swami, the incarnation of Aksharbrahman. He saw that Jinabhai, though often very tired, still completed his daily duties and services at the mandir. He was pleased to see the devotion of Jinabhai, and appreciated the zeal with which he served.

One morning, while giving *prasad* to Jinabhai Swami asked, "Jina, would you like to become a sadhu?" Jinabhai was filled with joy at Swami's question. He replied eagerly, "Yes Swamiji, I would be happy if you



"I would be happy if you would make me a sadhu."

would make me a sadhu. It is my only wish. For many days I have been hoping to talk to you about it. But today, you yourself have read my mind. Swamiji, please initiate me as a sadhu. I want to become a sadhu and serve you and Maharaj."

Swami Krishnacharandasji blessed him and said, "Your wish will be fulfilled."

8 JINA BHAGAT IN JUNAGADH

A year later, Jinabhai obtained permission from his parents to become a sadhu. Mother Puribai prepared *kansar* and served her son for the last time. Applying a *chandlo* to his forehead, and wishing him fulfilment in



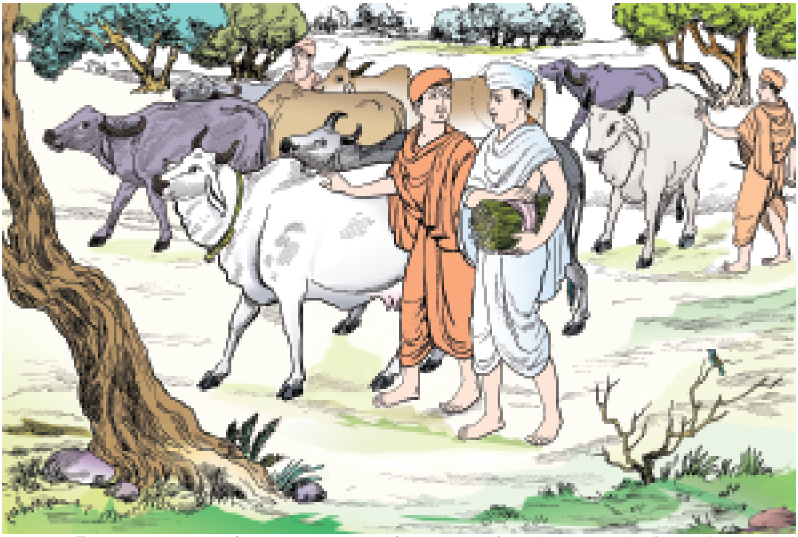
Parshad Jina Bhagat

his new life, she gave him a proud but sorrowful send off. On 1 November 1908 (Kartik *sud* 7, V.S. 1965), Jinabhai left home. He set out for Junagadh. On the way he was accompanied by his elder brother, Kamalshibhai. The very next day, they met Krishnacharandas Swami.

On 8 November 1908 (the full moon day (Punam) of Kartik, V.S. 1965), Jinabhai was given the *parshad diksha* by Krishnacharandas Swami. He was then given the name Jina Bhagat. Jina Bhagat immediately took on various duties at the mandir.

In those days the *parshads* were entrusted with the task of grazing the cows and buffaloes of the mandir. Jina Bhagat would go along with the other *parshads* to the foot of Mount Girnar to graze the cattle. While the cattle grazed, Jina Bhagat sang bhajans, and memorized Swamini Vato.

In the evening, Jina Bhagat would return to the mandir along with the cattle. On the way back he would cut and gather *babul* sticks, used for brushing teeth in the morning, for all three hundred sadhus in the mandir.



Returning to the mandir with a bundle of 300 babul sticks

Besides this, every morning he cleaned the cowsheds and collected cow-dung. He would then make little flat cakes out of the dung and placed them in the sun to dry. They were then used for fuel.

In spite of fatigue from the day's work Jina Bhagat always attended the *satsang* assemblies every evening. He would sing bhajans and chant the Swaminarayan mantra. Then he would stay and listen to the discourses till late night. Every morning he would get up at four to serve his guru once again. Such was his daily routine.

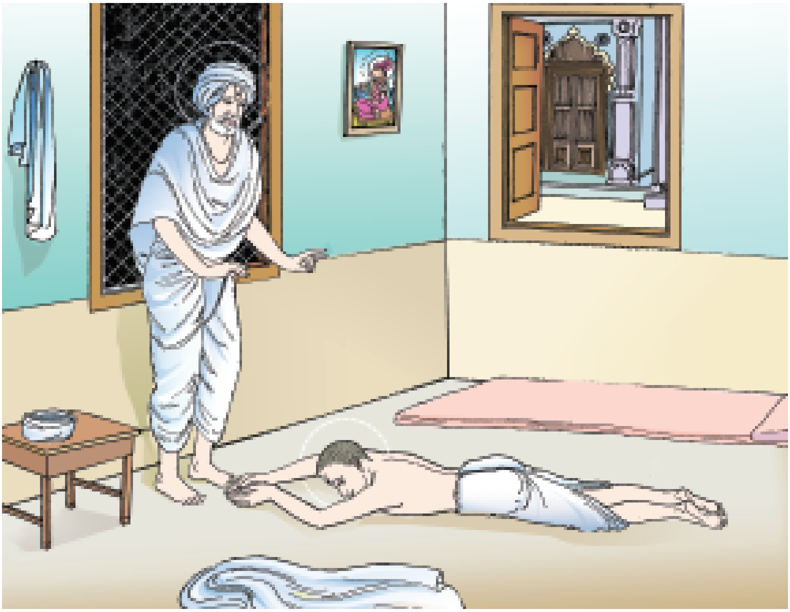
He earned the blessings of Krishnacharandas Swami by serving him devoutly for six months.

9 JAGA BHAKTA APPEARS IN A DREAM

During those days, Krishnaji Ada and Pujaji Bapu (disciples of Jaga Bhakta) were frequent visitors to Junagadh. Jina Bhagat listened to their discourses. Krishnaji Ada narrated many incidents about the greatness of Jaga Bhakta. Day after day Jina Bhagat heard about the spiritual glory of Jaga Bhakta.

Once, at night, a thought came to him, "How great Jaga Bhakta must be!" With this thought he fell asleep. During his sleep, at two o'clock in the morning, he had a wonderful dream. He dreamt that Jaga Bhakta was standing before him, wearing a dhoti and a white turban on his head. Jina Bhagat immediately prostrated before Jaga Bhakta, and addressed him saying, "Guru, today you have fulfilled my wish by giving me your darshan. I am overjoyed. Please say a few words of wisdom."

Jaga Bhakta replied, "You should keep two guidelines in mind. The first is to form a habit of reading the shastras and the second is to keep the association of holy sadhus." Then Jina Bhagat again prostrated before Jaga Bhakta in his dream.



Jaga Bhagat appears in a dream

The habit of reading shastras means daily reading of the Vachanamrut, Swamini Vatu, Shikshapatri, Bhaktachintamani, Harililamrut, etc. with reverence, and applying the wisdom contained in them. Contact of revered sadhus means seeking the company of a God-realized Sadhu such as Shastriji Maharaj.

We must also cultivate these two habits and thus strive to achieve inner fulfilment.

10 FIRST MEETING

Jina Bhagat belonged to a group of sadhus led by Krishnacharandas Swami. Once, the group went to Rajkot.

One day, Shastriji Maharaj also arrived in Rajkot. He stayed at the house of Krishnaji Ada. When Jina Bhagat heard this news, he felt a strong desire to have the darshan of Shastriji Maharaj. So, early in the



First darshan of Shastriji Maharaj at Rajkot

morning, under the pretext of going for a bath in the Aji river, Jina Bhagat and three other sadhus went to the house of Krishnaji Ada.

When Shastriji Maharaj awoke at four o'clock, Jadavjibhai informed him that some sadhus had come for darshan. Shastriji Maharaj went to the room in which the sadhus were waiting. Jina Bhagat and the other sadhus paid homage to Shastriji Maharaj and then presented to him a *mala* and a *tumbdi,* which had been used by Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. Shastriji Maharaj was greatly pleased.

Jina Bhagat could not take his eyes off Shastriji Maharaj and looked at him with great reverence. Shastriji Maharaj, too, looked at Jina Bhagat with much affection.

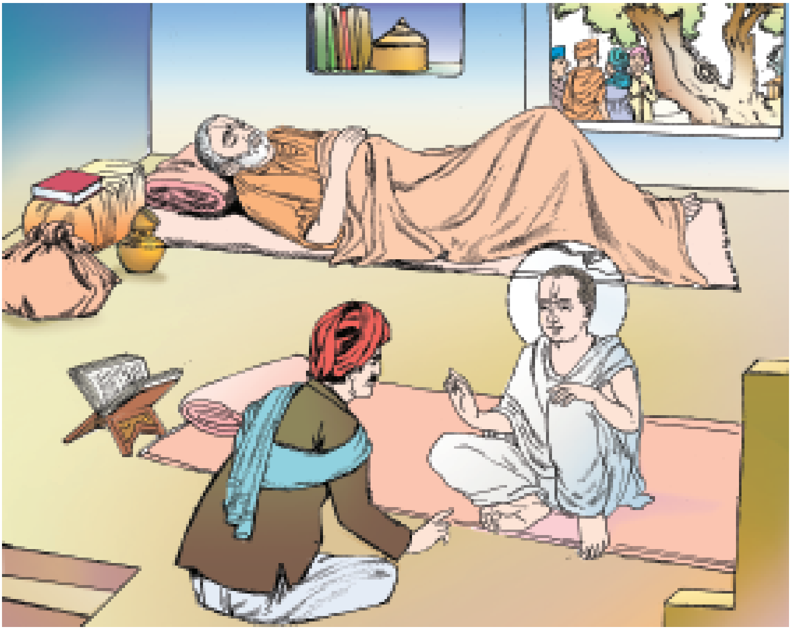
Jina Bhagat thought, "Shastriji Maharaj is worthy of being a guru." And he mentally accepted Shastriji Maharaj as his guru.

Thus, on 23 August 1909 (Shravan *sud* 7, V.S. 1965), Jina Bhagat met Shastriji Maharaj for the first time. It was like a river meeting the ocean.

11 "I AM ONLY A SERVANT."

After staying for some days in Rajkot, Swami Krishnacharandasji and his group of sadhus resumed their tour of the villages. In the course of their tour they visited Hajdiyala near Sardhar. There was no Swaminarayan mandir in the village, and therefore the sadhus rested at the community hall of the village.

It was afternoon. The sadhus, following the afternoon sermon, retired for a short rest. Jina Bhagat, after completing his duties also lay down for some rest. A Rajput devotee, who was an expert in astrology and palmistry, was struck with wonder when he saw the



"O Jina Bhagat! You will be a great sadhu one day."

soles of Jina Bhagat's feet. He had never seen such extraordinary lines on the feet of any sadhu before.

Thus, when Jina Bhagat got up and welcomed him, the Rajput devotee exclaimed, "O Jina Bhagat! You will be a great sadhu one day. People in their thousands will follow you. They will pray to you to earn your favour and blessings. Shriji Maharaj will be your constant companion. There are *urdhvarekhas* on your soles. Holy men with *urdhvarekhas* are extremely rare. They are the sacred signs possessed by a sadhu who has a constant rapport with God."

On hearing these words, Jina Bhagat at once covered his feet and said, "Don't talk like that. I am only a servant. Krishnacharandas Swami is a great sadhu. Please never speak about this to anybody."

But the devotee could not remain silent. He at once disclosed his thoughts to Krishnacharandas Swami.

Swamiji smilingly said, "Yes, he possesses all the qualities of a great sadhu."

12 AUSTERE JINA BHAGAT

The King of Mengni was a great devotee of God. At his request, Krishnacharandas Swami visited Mengni every year to celebrate the Annakut festival.

One year, however, the King of Lodhika invited Swamiji to celebrate Annakut in Lodhika. The king was also a staunch devotee. He provided all the raw materials for the celebrations. From morning till evening, the sadhus and *parshads* devoutly prepared the various sweet and savoury delicacies for the festival. When the day of Annakut arrived, a grand festival was held. The delicacies were first offered to God. At the king's order a meal with *sata* and *jalebi* were ready to be served to everyone.



Krishnacharandas Swami tells Jina Bhagat to have his meal

Jina Bhagat used to fast some days in the month. Realizing that such delicious sweets like *sata* and *jalebi* will be served on that day he decided to observe a fast. All the sadhus went for lunch, except Jina Bhagat.

When the king heard that Jina Bhagat was fasting, he pleaded with him saying, "Today is a festival day. You should not fast today, so please eat." Jina Bhagat politely refused. The king repeated his request several times but Jina Bhagat told him, "I have a stomachache and am not hungry, so I do not want to eat anything."

The king then appealed to Krishnacharandas Swami, "Please tell the young Jina Bhagat to eat." So Swamiji asked Jina Bhagat not to fast that day. But he gave the same reply to Swamiji, and did not eat. Thus, despite such tasty delicacies, Jina Bhagat fasted.

Krishnacharandas Swami was inwardly pleased that Jina Bhagat was not tempted even by the tastiest of sweets to break his fast. He praised his austerity and self-control. That night he called Jina Bhagat and placed his hands on his head, and blessed him. He advised the other young sadhus to cultivate the same nvirtues of austerity and self-restraint as Jina Bhagat.

13 KRISHNAJI ADA'S BLESSINGS

In Vartal, on the morning of 11 April 1911 (Chaitra *sud* 13, V.S. 1967), Acharya Shripatiprasadji Maharaj gave Jina Bhagat the *bhagwati diksha*. Jina Bhagat was renamed Sadhu Jnanjivandasji. But the sadhus and devotees fondly called him 'Yogi', while Krishnacharandas Swami called him 'Jnanji Swami'.

On 7 June 1911 (Jeth *sud* 11, V.S. 1967), after celebrating *ekadashi,* Sadhu Jnanjivandasji, along with seven other sadhus, left the Junagadh mandir to join Shastriji Maharaj to help promote the true philosophy of



Krishnaji Ada blesses Yogi Maharaj

Akshar and Purushottam, as taught by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut.

It was on Saturday, 4 October 1911 (Aso *sud* 11, V.S. 1967), that Krishnaji Ada breathed his last. Bidding his last 'Jai Swaminarayan' to Shastriji Maharaj and other sadhus he asked, "Where is Jnanji Swami? Call him here." Jnanji Swami (Yogiji Maharaj), who was sitting in the corner, prostrated before him and then came and stood respectfully by his side. Krishnaji Ada asked him to come nearer; and when he did, he placed his hands upon his head, and blessed him.

Nirgundas Swami remarked, "Jnanji Swami! It is not Krishnaji Ada who is blessing you, but believe that Bhagatji Maharaj and Jaga Bhagat are blessing you."

Because of his great love for all, Krishnaji Ada's eyes welled up with tears. Then bidding 'Jai Swaminarayan', his last farewell, he left this world for Akshardham.

14 THE DESIRELESS SADHU

Yogiji Maharaj was absolutely without any desire. Though he was young, he never wanted anything for himself. All day long he would remain engaged in spiritual discourses, singing bhajans, memorizing scriptures and serving others.

Once, Yogiji Maharaj was with a group of sadhus in Bhavnagar. They were staying at the house of a staunch devotee. This house was situated on a main road. It was evening and Yogiji Maharaj was on the upper floor of the house reading the Swamini Vatu.

Down below, people were eagerly awaiting the king's wedding procession. The procession was to pass along the main road. Both sides of the road were crowded with

onlookers. Windows and balconies were also full of eager spectators. From a distance, its drums and clarinets could be heard.

Suddenly, a devotee got up and approached Yogiji Maharaj and said, “Come on, why are you seated here? The king’s wedding procession is here. It is worth seeing. Come to the window – don’t you want to see it?”

Whereupon Yogiji Maharaj replied, “Of what consequence is it for us sadhus? Of what use is it for us to see such things? Once we have renounced something, why let it re-enter our heart?” The devotee was amazed by his reply and spirit of renunciation. He bowed down at the feet of Yogiji Maharaj.



The young and spirited Yogiji Maharaj

Due to this spirit of service and other saintly virtues the veteran sadhu, Narayandas Swami of Junagadh, thrice sent the message, "Jnanji Swami, if you return to Junagadh, I will myself come down to Jetpur from Junagadh to welcome you, and bring you here in a grand procession." But Jnanji Swami stayed with Shastriji Maharaj to help him accomplish many noble tasks.

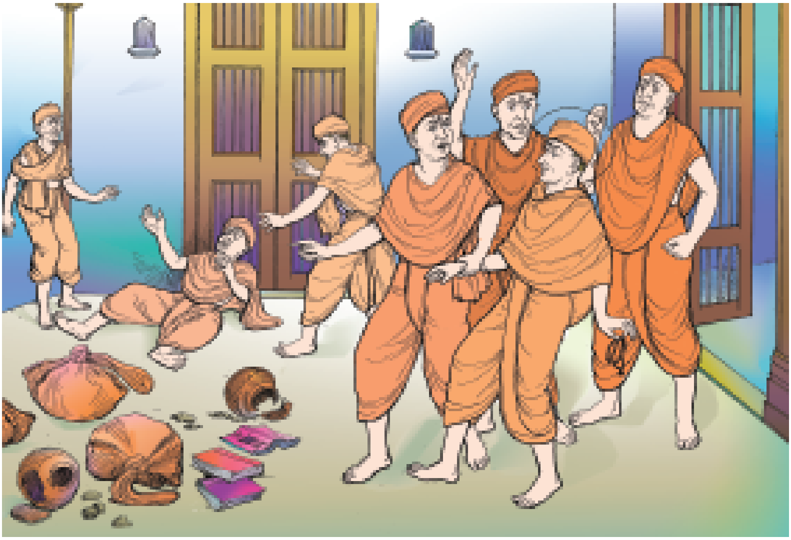
In Rajkot, Yogiji Maharaj unintentionally made a small mistake. ViJnandas Swami became very angry and ordered Yogiji Maharaj to leave his unfinished meal as punishment. Hargovind Mehta of Vadhwan witnessed this scene, and in the afternoon privately asked Yogiji Maharaj, "Yogi! Why do you tolerate so much? Don't you feel like leaving here and going home?" Yogiji Maharaj replied happily, "When the guru scolds it is for our good. Without punishment we would not remain alert. It helps us to correct our mistakes."

Hargovindbhai was amazed at his reply and fell at the feet of the young sadhu in recognition of his patience and humility.

15 INDIFFERENT TO INSULT

Now Yogiji Maharaj was known to belong to Shastriji Maharaj's group. While touring the villages with the sadhus, Yogiji Maharaj arrived in the village of Keriya. They stayed in the village mandir. Some resentful sadhus, who were not on friendly terms with Shastriji Maharaj, heard that the sadhus of Shastriji Maharaj had put up in the mandir.

It was afternoon and, except for Yogiji Maharaj who was fasting that day, all the sadhus were having an afternoon nap. Meanwhile, the resentful sadhus came to the mandir. At once, they flung the clothes and other



The resentful sadhus beating the innocent sadhus

belongings of Shastriji Maharaj's sadhus out of the mandir and broke their water pots.

They saw that Yogiji Maharaj was the youngest, so they caught hold of him and pushed him out of the mandir. "Call your Gunatit, and see if he can save you," they shouted, and then banged the blind sadhu Bhagwatswarupdasji against the grills.

Another sadhu was violently pushed aside into a corner. Others were beaten severely, while Vignandas Swami was locked up behind the grills.

The villagers came to know about the sudden unrest. They hurried to the mandir with sticks in their hands. They threatened the intruders, and peace was quickly restored.

Though the sadhus opposing Akshar Purushottam had beaten and insulted them, Yogiji Maharaj and his fellow sadhus did not utter even a single word against them. They met the assault witha smile on their face. Their humility and saintliness was admirable.

16 A HARD-WORKING SADHU

Yogiji Maharaj, though young excelled in service. From early morning to late at night, he remained busy in the service of others. He never tired. In fact, he never felt at ease in the absence of *seva*. Even during fasts he would serve others with the same enthusiasm and love.

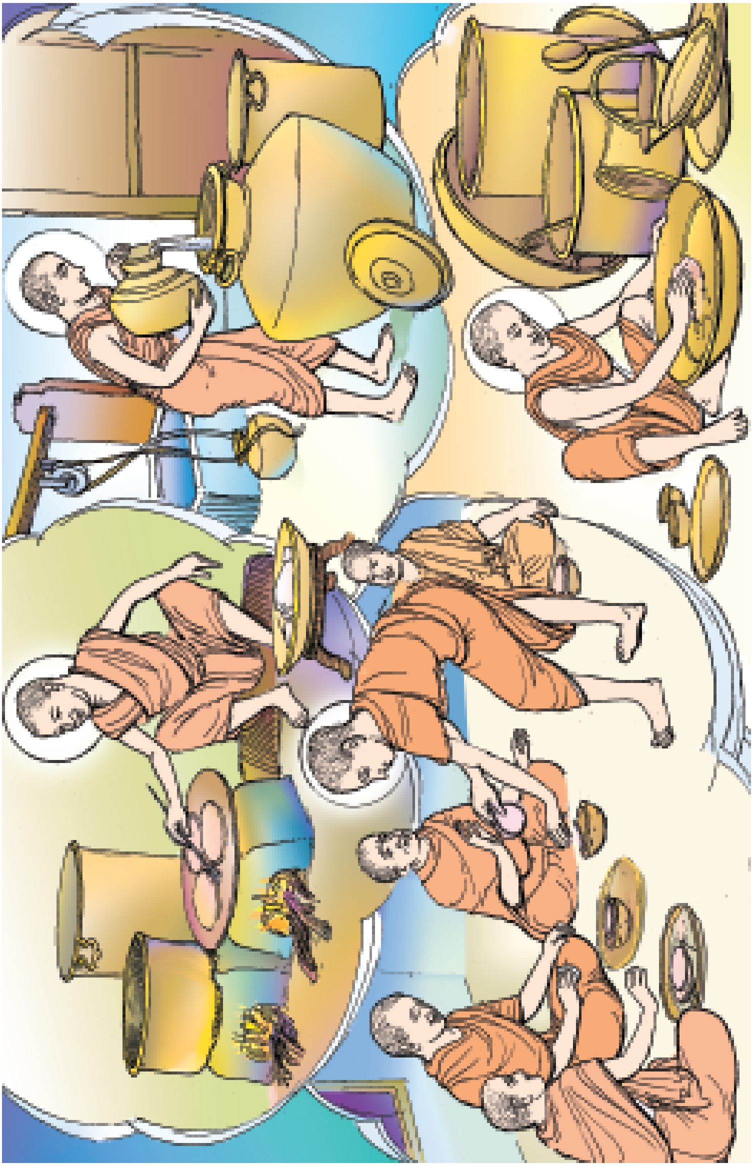
Each day he would get up early in the morning, then after bathing and prayers, he would start cooking in the kitchen. He would cook 300 *rotlas*. He prepared and cooked the *rotlas* simultaneously on two separate hot-plates. Whilst cooking, Yogiji Maharaj would sing bhajans and recite Swamini Vatu. He used to cook everything by himself no matter how many people there were.

When the food was ready, he would call everybody to eat by hailing, 'Vasudev Hare'. He himself served the food to all the sadhus and devotees. He was always the last to have his meal.

He also drew water from the well that would be required for cooking and for bathing by the sadhus and devotees. Everyday, early in the morning, he rinsed out all the big pots and vessels, and filled them with filtered drinking water.

Even after all this *seva,* he would also wash the utensils after the meals were over. Many times he would be found cleaning the huge pots till late at night.

Yogiji Maharaj was an ideal of *seva*.



Yogiji Maharaj cooked food, drew water, served the sadhus and washed the cooking utensils

17 A REAL SADHU

The sadhus visited village after village to teach the philosophy of Akshar Purushottam and a purer way of life. They cared not whether it was day or night. Wherever they went, they collected flour and cooked their meals from whatever they managed to get.

Once the sadhus had halted at a village called Sankarda. Every morning, they would go round the village to beg for alms. Yogiji Maharaj, accompanied by the blind sadhu, Bhagwatswarupdasji, would also go around to beg for alms. Holding one of his hands, he would lead Bhagwatswarupdasji along the road. A cloth bag for collecting the alms hung from Yogiji Maharaj's shoulder. When anybody offered flour, grains, etc. he would empty it into the bag with the other hand. As he walked, he took great care that no stones, thorns or holes in the road got in the way of Bhagwatswarupdasji. After the morning round was over, he cooked whatever alms they had received. He first devoutly offered the food to God. Then, after serving the other sadhus, he would finally sit down to have his meal.

Karsansang Bapu of Adval often saw Yogiji Maharaj leading the blind and aged Bhagwatswarupdasji while going round for alms. One day, he saw the barefooted Yogiji Maharaj begging for alms in the scorching heat of summer. He felt pity for him. He asked, "Yogiji Maharaj, why don't you take a younger sadhu with you? How difficult it must be to be with such an aged sadhu while begging for alms!" Yogiji Maharaj, with a smiling face, replied, "Bapu, it is my good fortune to have such an aged sadhu with me. I am extremely fortunate for the opportunity to serve a revered old sadhu! Also, by moving about with him I get the benefit of his vast knowledge and experience. And, I also get a chance to

serve the mandir by carrying the alms." Karsansang Bapu heard these words of Yogiji Maharaj and mentally bowed to him with great respect.

Once, Yogiji Maharaj went to Narayan Dharo from the village of Mojidad, to bathe. There, a sadhu named Narayanprasad, wild with resent and envy, insulted and abused Yogiji Maharaj. Yogiji Maharaj merely smiled and chanted 'Maharaj...Swami', and after finishing his bath quietly returned to his residence without uttering a word in retaliation.

Some time later, when the monsoon had set in, this same sadhu, Narayanprasad, alighted from a train at Botad railway station at two o'clock in the morning. The cart driver refused to take him to Kariyani. Walking wearily along the muddy road, he came to the Akshar Purushottam Mandir at Sarangpur and knocked on the door. A thorn had lodged deep into his foot. Thus his foot was swollen, and he was in extreme agony. The



Yogiji Maharaj collecting alms with Bhagwatswarupdas Swami

watchman came and informed, "Yogiji Maharaj, a sadhu has come and wishes to stay for the night."

Yogiji Maharaj went to receive him and brought him inside with courtesy. He then removed the thorn from his foot and dressed the wound. He lovingly fed him *prasad* of *puri* and ladoo. He made a bed for him, and gently asked him to rest. In the morning he kept a cart ready to take Narayanprasad to Kariyani. Narayanprasad recognized Yogiji Maharaj as the very sadhu he had insulted a few weeks before. He underwent a complete change of heart and thought, "Yogiji has served me with love even though I had insulted him. He has not said one word of rebuke to me. He has won me over completely with his great affection."

Narayanprasad repented, fell at the feet of Yogiji Maharaj, and said, "You are a humble and loving sadhu because you do good to those who have harmed you. You are an ideal *paramhansa* of Shriji Maharaj, who repays animosity with love and affection." Then receiving the blessings of Yogiji Maharaj, Narayanprasad left for Kariyani by cart.

18 MANDIR SERVICE

Yogiji Maharaj enjoyed serving Thakorji and the mandir as much as he liked to serve the sadhus and devotees. When engaged in such *seva*, he would forget hunger and fatigue. He sincerely obeyed all the commands of Shastriji Maharaj. He served him and helped him in all his work.

Shastriji Maharaj built his first mandir in Bochasan, and consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam in the central shrine. After some time he also started building a mandir in Sarangpur. The work was in progress, but due to lack of funds, the sadhus and the



Serving on the construction site

devotees also helped in the construction of the mandir.

Yogiji Maharaj, too, after completing all his normal duties used to help in the construction work of the mandir. He carried large stones on his head for the masons to lay. He mixed lime and sand with a spade, and supplied the mixture. He assisted in digging and filling in the foundation. He was the youngest in age, but in service, he excelled everyone.

He had only one thought, "A mandir will be built, and the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam will be consecrated. How can one ever get such an opportunity to serve Maharaj! So, seize the opportunity and serve as much as possible, so that God is pleased."

Shastriji Maharaj was much pleased with Yogiji Maharaj's sincere service and loving nature. He frequently praised and blessed Yogiji Maharaj.

19 SWAMI-SHRIJI ACCEPTS OFFERINGS

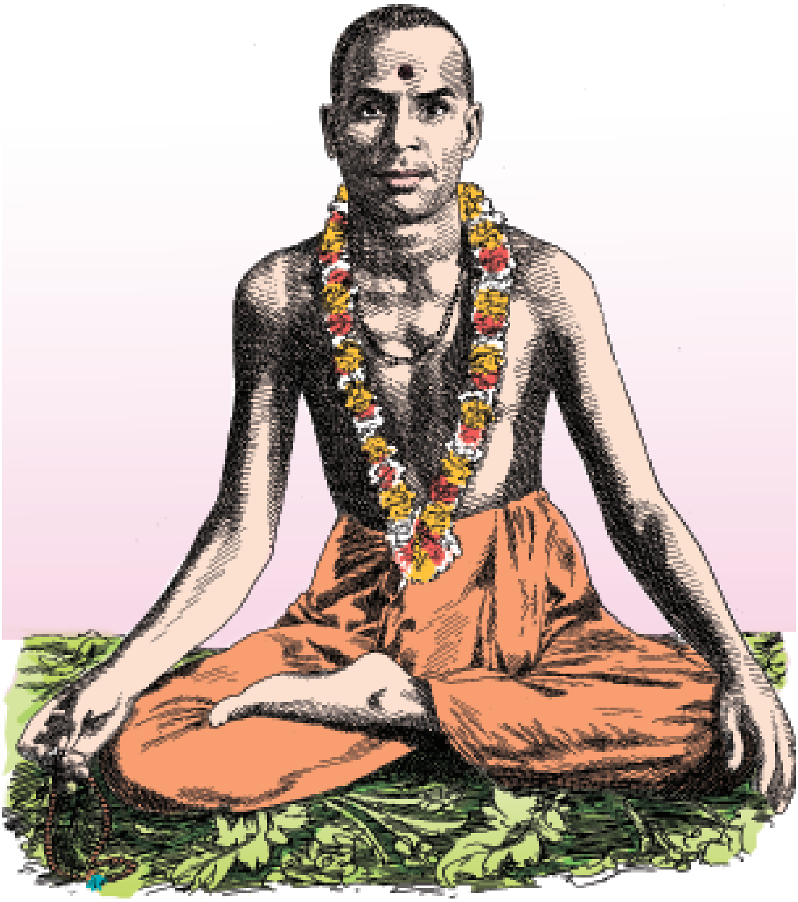
Jaljhilani Ekadashi was being celebrated at Sarangpur. Shastriji Maharaj was feeling unwell and was resting in bed. Some devotees from Bhavnagar had come there for the celebration. Afterwards, Kuberbhai, a leading devotee of Bhavnagar, requested Shastriji Maharaj, "Swami, please come to Bhavnagar so that we may all benefit by your association."

Shastriji Maharaj replied, smiling, "I am not well. Take Yogiji Maharaj in my place. I am included in Yogiji Maharaj." They were pleased with these words of Shastriji Maharaj, and returned to Bhavnagar along with Yogiji Maharaj.

Prabhudas Sheth invited Yogiji Maharaj and the other sadhus for lunch at his house. A pious Brahmin prepared a meal of ladoo, *dal,* rice, vegetables, etc. When the meal was ready, Jayantibhai, along with Prabhudas Sheth, approached Yogiji Maharaj and requested, "Yogiji Maharaj! You have won the favour of Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami. Today pray to them on our behalf to accept the *thal*."

Yogiji Maharaj smiled and answered, "Let us go and pray. Shriji Maharaj and Swami will surely come to accept the *thal*." So saying, Yogiji Maharaj entered the prayer room. The *thal* was placed before the *murtis*. Silver cups full of water were also placed near the *murtis*. The curtains were then drawn. Yogiji Maharaj sat there and all around him sat the devotees. Yogiji Maharaj started singing, *"Avinashi avo re..."* with profound devotion.

After half-an-hour, when the curtains were opened, they gasped with wonder at what had happened. Five ladoos, *dal* and some rice had been accepted by Maharaj. The water cup was also half empty. All the devotees were



HDH Yogiji Maharaj

struck by the power and devotion of Yogiji Maharaj. They were convinced that Yogiji Maharaj enjoyed the favour of Swami and Shriji.

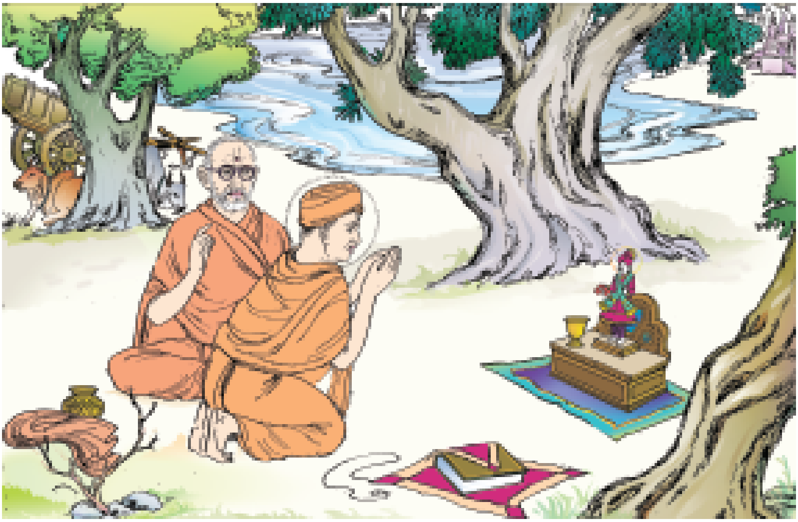
20 DEVOTION PAR EXCELLENCE

Once Yogiji Maharaj and Nirgundas Swami were going to Gadhada from Sarangpur by bullock-cart. It was a hot summer's day, and the road was deserted. There

were neither any wells nor rivers on the route. It was already four o'clock in the afternoon.

Yogiji Maharaj had the small metallic *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj (the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj formerly worshipped by Gunatitanand Swami). The time to offer water to Harikrishna Maharaj was fast approaching but as there was no water anywhere Yogiji Maharaj became worried and upset. "Thakorji must be very thirsty. Harikrishna Maharaj's throat must be dry due to thirst," he thought to himself.

It was six in the evening when they came to a river. Yogiji Maharaj asked the cart-driver to stop by the riverside. He took the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj, bathed it in the river and offered it filtered water to drink. Yogiji Maharaj was still not fully satisfied. He prostrated and prayed repeatedly before the *murti,* "O Maharaj! Please forgive me. I am at fault. Today, I have failed to give you water on time. Please forgive me." On hearing this, Nirgundas Swami, who was standing nearby said, "What is your fault? We were travelling and



"O Maharaj! Please forgive me."

couldn't find any water on the way, and so we were late."

Still, Yogiji Maharaj kept bowing to the *murti* repeatedly and prayed for forgiveness.

Words fail to describe the full measure of his service, devotion and humility.

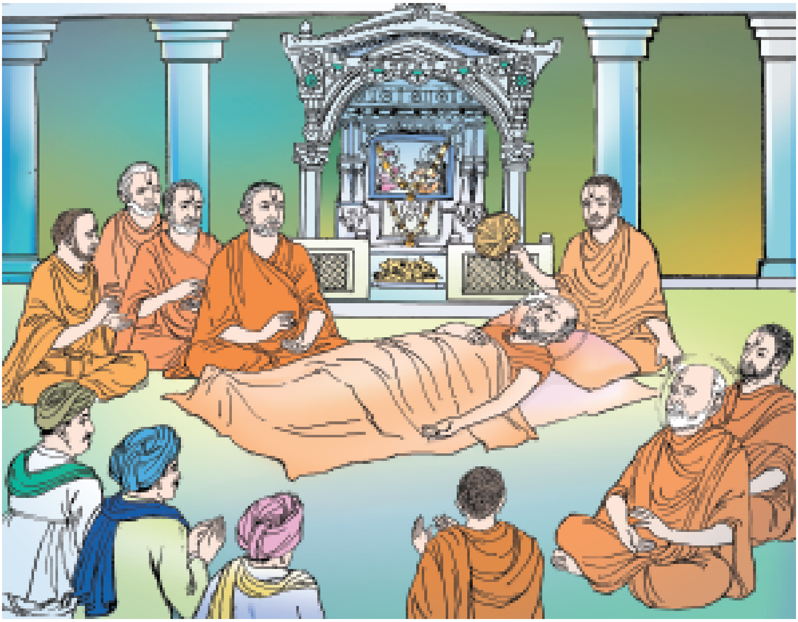
21 SNAKE BITE

A small memorial shrine had been constructed in Gondal at the place where the last rites of Gunatitanand Swami had been performed. It was called Akshar Deri. To add to its sanctity, Shastriji Maharaj started building a beautiful mandir over it. Yogiji Maharaj was stationed there at the time. Every day he used to get up early in the morning at four o'clock and perform puja of the *charnarvind* of Shriji Maharaj which had been consecrated there. He also performed the *mahapuja* and offered *thal* in the Akshar Deri.

While the mandir was being built, Yogiji Maharaj and other sadhus used to live in huts built of mud and bricks. Once at midnight, while Yogiji Maharaj was sound asleep, a venomous black cobra bit the index finger of his left hand. The sudden rush of pain woke him up.

As a result of the poison, the pain quickly spread through his whole body. However, Yogiji Maharaj did not complain. While chanting the Swaminarayan mantra his eyes closed.

Some anxious devotees suggested a physician be called. Others proposed various remedies. Meanwhile, Shastriji Maharaj arrived. When he heard about the snake bite he said, "Take Yogiji Maharaj to the Akshar Deri and chant the Swaminarayan mantra. The effect of the poison will vanish by the divine power of the Swaminarayan Mahamantra." Immediately, the sadhus



Yogiji Maharaj in the Akshar Deri after being bitten by a snake

lifted Yogiji Maharaj and carried him to the Akshar Deri and started chanting the holy name of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. After exactly twelve hours, the effect of the poison subsided. Yogiji Maharaj opened his eyes and bowed to Shastriji Maharaj. Just then, a government doctor arrived. He was amazed to see that the effect of the poison had been nullified by chanting the Swaminarayan mantra. He fell at the feet of Shastriji Maharaj. The King of Gondal and his officers were also surprised at the divine power of the Akshar Deri. They were convinced that it was a highly sanctified place.

22 HEAD OF AKSHAR MANDIR

It was the year 1934 CE (V.S. 1990). Most of the construction work of the Gondal mandir (also called 'Akshar Mandir') had been completed. In the same year, on 24 May 1934 (Vaishakh *sud* 10), Shastriji Maharaj

ceremoniously consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar Purushottam in the mandir in traditional Vedic style. After the function, an assembly of all the devotees was held in the compound of the mandir. Here in the presence of thousands of devotees Shastriji Maharaj appointed Yogiji Maharaj as the Mahant of the Akshar Mandir and garlanded him. The whole congregration greeted the choice with joy and acclaim.

To Yogiji Maharaj the Akshar Mandir and Akshar Deri meant everything in life. The Akshar Deri was dearer to him than his soul. He was never tired of performing *pradakshinas* of the Deri. He would get up early at 3.30 am and sweep the floor of the Deri. After performing puja of the *charnarvind* with sandalwood paste and flowers, he would perform *arti*. Then he gave spiritual discourses to the devotees. He also performed *mahapuja* in the Deri regularly. During the *mahapuja* he prayed whole-heartedly, “May the number of sadhus increase and may the Satsang spread.” During his free hours he kept the accounts of the mandir himself, and maintained the ledger. Yogiji Maharaj looked after the maintenance of the mandir and himself attended to the needs and the comforts of the guests. The greater the number of visitors the happier he would be. He never allowed any visitor to leave without eating.

Rana Daji Bapu assisted him in many of his duties. One day, Daji Bapu wanted to consult Yogiji Maharaj about the mandir accounts. He searched for him in the *kothar*, but did not find him there. Thinking that he might be in the Akshar Deri or upstairs in the mandir, he went there to look for him. But he was not there either. After searching for him everywhere, he finally went to the kitchen where he found him cooking, all by himself.

Seeing the mahant of such a big mandir working

like an ordinary cook in the kitchen, he said, "I have been searching for you for a long time. Why are you cooking? Where is the sadhu who cooks daily?"

Yogiji Maharaj quietly replied, "The sadhu who cooks is ill. By Maharaj's grace, today I have got the chance of this service. For a long time I had wanted to prepare food to serve Thakorji. So, today I have got the opportunity."

Hearing these noble sentiments, Bapu admired Yogiji Maharaj more than ever before. But when he enquired of the sadhu in charge of the kitchen, Bapu found that he was not ill at all. He and some other sadhus were loitering around and not doing their duty. He scolded them, "Yogiji Maharaj works day and night. Yet you make him serve in the kitchen as well." He then sent them to the kitchen immediately. Along with Yogiji Maharaj, Bapu went to the mandir office to discuss the accounts.

23 DEVOTION TO GURU

Yogiji Maharaj used to eat only once a day. Moreover, every third day he observed a fast. Even when fasting in the scorching heat of the summer, he would carry all the luggage on his head while visiting villages in the company of Shastriji Maharaj. He would spend the whole day in the service of others. Owing to such incessant heavy work he developed a hernia.

In the year 1937 CE (V.S. 1993), Dr. Aspinol, an English surgeon at Rajkot Hospital, was consulted. After examining Yogiji Maharaj he said, "Swamiji, you will have to undergo an operation." And so, on the instructions of Shastriji Maharaj, Hirjibhai reserved a special room in the Rajkot Hospital for Yogiji Maharaj.

At the time, Shastriji Maharaj was also under

medical treatment in Gondal. Still, he came to Rajkot before the day of the operation. Though it was winter and very cold, Shastriji Maharaj, as usual, got up early in the morning, and after finishing his morning puja he put on his *pagh* and went to the hospital without delay. As he entered the hospital premises the attendants were taking Yogiji Maharaj on a stretcher to the operating theatre.

On seeing Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj was overcome with joy. He folded his hands in reverence. Shastriji Maharaj blessed him and Yogiji Maharaj was taken into the operating theatre. The doctor performed the operation very skilfully. When the operation was over, Yogiji Maharaj was carried back on a stretcher to his room in the hospital.

Yogiji Maharaj had brought the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj to the hospital and had placed it on a table in front of his bed. The devotees were all sitting on the floor around the bed. Shastriji Maharaj was sitting on a chair in front of the bed and was chanting with a *mala* in hand. After about two hours the effect of the anaesthetic subsided. Yogiji Maharaj stirred in his bed and opened his eyes. Shastriji Maharaj was sitting right in front of him and smiling softly. Immediately Yogiji Maharaj folded his hands in reverence and asked the devotees sitting nearby in a low voice, "Has milk been served to Shastriji Maharaj?"

The question came as a surprise to the devotees and to Dr. Aspinol. They felt, "This sadhu was not unconscious. This yogi must have been in a divine trance. Only then is it possible to remember the guru on waking."

Yogiji Maharaj was, at the time, the personal attendant of Shastriji Maharaj at Gondal. There he served him milk and medicine daily. When he awoke the

first thing he remembered was his duty to his guru. How unique was his devotion to his guru!

24 "SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ IS ALWAYS MANIFEST."

In 1951 CE (V.S. 2007), Shastriji Maharaj fell ill. One day he said, "I have performed the *arti* of the *murtis* for the Gadhada mandir. They will now be ritually consecrated by Yogiji Maharaj. There is not even a slight difference between me and Yogi. I am Yogi, and Yogi is me."

These were his last words. On 10 May 1951 (Vaishakh *sud* 4), Shastriji Maharaj passed away to Akshardham. His body was cremated the next day. The devotees were in deep shock. They all thought, "Shastriji Maharaj has gone. Now what will happen to us?" No one knew what to do.

At that time Yogiji Maharaj reassured everyone, "Shastriji Maharaj has not gone. We should never think that Shastriji Maharaj has gone from our midst. Shastriji Maharaj is forever present in Satsang." Listening to these words of Yogiji Maharaj everyone felt, "Shriji Maharaj was ever present in Shastriji Maharaj, and that same Shriji Maharaj is now manifest in Yogiji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj will now bless everyone through Yogiji Maharaj." All saw Shastriji Maharaj in Yogiji Maharaj. The spiritual eyes of all opened.

Six days after the passing away of Shastriji Maharaj to Akshardham, on 16 May 1951 (Vaishakh *sud* 10, V.S. 2007), Yogiji Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* in Gadhada with great joy and festivity. Fifty thousand devotees had assembled to witness the ceremony. Everyone was convinced that, "Shastriji Maharaj is always manifest in the Satsang."

The opponents were disappointed. They had thought that as Shastriji Maharaj had reverted to Akshardham, no one would attend the celebrations and that the Akshar Purushottam Sanstha would collapse. But they were amazed by the personality of Yogiji Maharaj. The glory of Akshar Purushottam spread in all directions. It was the beginning of a new era in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj. He captured the hearts of all the devotees, and won their respect and admiration.

25 YOUTH CENTRES AND SATSANG ASSEMBLIES

Yogiji Maharaj had been conducting weekly *satsang* assemblies of the devotees for a long time. After the departure of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj injected a new vigour into these activities. Gradually, he established a youth wing (Yuvak Mandal). In the beginning, only a few youths attended the assemblies. The organizers, therefore, were somewhat discouraged. But Swamiji lovingly encouraged them, “Happiness lies in obeying commands. Your youth centre will flourish. So, be patient. Bring new youth friends to the assembly. Conduct discourses and explain our messages. Then, by Maharaj’s grace, the number of youths will increase.” If any centre had stopped, he would restart it. Thus, he established youth centres in every village or city he visited. He kept a record and encouraged them by writing to the members regularly. In no time, many youth centres sprang up in Gujarat. In many places assemblies were also organized for children (Bal Mandal) to teach them the knowledge of *satsang*.

Yogiji Maharaj often said, “One should attend the weekly youth or *satsang* assembly even if one has to forego a profit of Rs. 25,000. It is not possible to meet the

devotees individually in their homes. But if we attend the *satsang* assembly, then we can meet all the elders and youths at the same time. We also get to learn about the moral and spiritual beliefs of our Sanstha. Moreover, at such gatherings, Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and Shastriji Maharaj are divinely present. So one should never miss these *satsang* assemblies."

Yogiji Maharaj took keen interest in all the activities of the youths. He intently observed their activities such as public speaking, yoga *asans*, bands, dramas and *ras*. He blessed them and applauded their efforts. He would listen attentively to their articles which were read out to him from the handwritten magazines they had prepared. Yogiji Maharaj used to say, "A handwritten magazine should be put out every three months."

26 YOUTHS AND YOGIRAJ

Youths and children were very dear to Yogiji Maharaj. He often said, "Youths are my heart." And he cared for them as one cares for one's heart. He spoke to them affectionately, showed genuine interest in whatever they said, and lovingly put his hands on their heads or shoulders in appreciation. Moving his delicate hands around their neck he would quietly check whether the youth had a *kanthi* or not. If any one was found without a *kanthi*, he would immediately give him one. He won them over by showering them with more love than even a mother.

In the summer and Diwali vacations, Yogiji Maharaj used to take the youths to the villages with him. During this time he would teach them Swamini Vatu, Vachanamrut, kirtans, *cheshta,* etc.

Once, while Yogiji Maharaj was walking with the support of two youths, he said, "On two sides are two

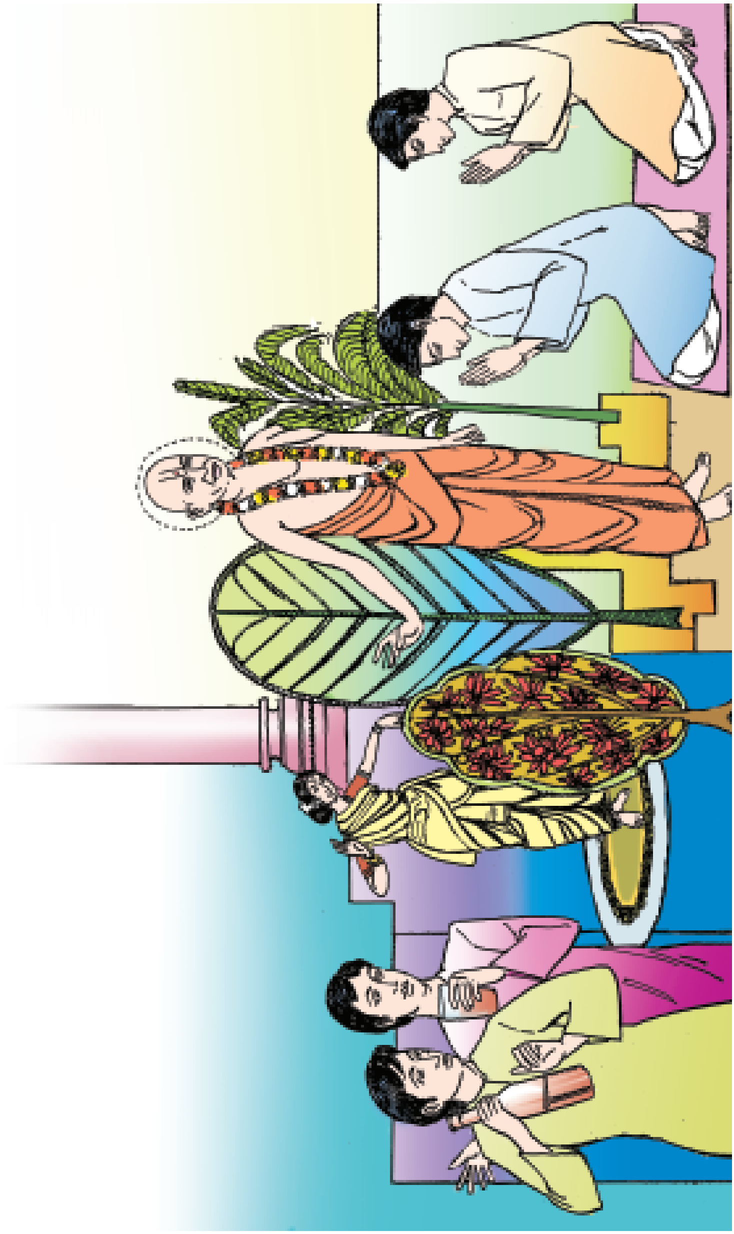
youths. In the middle is Yogi the youth."

He took personal care of the youths who toured the villages with him. He personally prepared *rotlas* for them, served them food, and in case anyone fell ill, he would care for him during the illness.

Yogiji Maharaj woke up early at 4.30 am and would then awaken the youths. He gave discourses on subjects like *agna*, *upasana* and *seva*. He was especially pleased by those who observed a complete fast with either food or even a drop of water. He showed his joy by blessing them and patting them on their backs. At 11.00 pm, after the evening *satsang* assembly for the devotees and singing of the *cheshta* were over, Yogiji Maharaj would gather all the youths in a quiet corner of the hall and sit with them again. He encouraged them to converse among themselves in difference languages such as English, Hindi or Gujarati. He would sometimes join in to amuse the youths by using English words, even though he did not know much English.

Yogiji Maharaj captivated the hearts of even college students. He helped many to overcome bad habits such as smoking, eating *pan* and visiting the cinema. He inspired them to live a pure, simple and disciplined life, and thus prepared them to become ideal devotees and citizens. Thus, during their vacation every year, the youths accompanied Yogiji Maharaj for a month or two. When they left at the end, he advised them, "Observe *niyams* sincerely. Attend the weekly youth assemblies regularly. If there isn't a youth centre in your village, then start one. I will write to you."

His affection for them was so great that he would take the trouble of walking upto the mandir gate to see them off. The youths were inspired by Yogiji Maharaj and their eyes filled with tears when they left.



Youths and Yogiraj

27 YOUTHS BECOME SADHUS

Within ten years Yogiji Maharaj had formed groups of dedicated and trained youths in many different towns. By his wish, even at home these youths led a simple and pious life. They fasted every fifth day and slept on a simple mat without using even a pillow. They had cold water baths every morning and made it a point to apply *tilak-chandlo* on their foreheads. They did not. eat or drink anything that was not prepared at home. And they never saw .any films.

By the wish of Yogiji Maharaj, many such youths were inspired to become sadhus. He would ask, "I want you to become a sadhu. Will you?" Hearing these loving words, the educated youths readily agreed.

Once, Yogiji Maharaj wrote a letter to a youth who wanted to become sadhu, "I do not want to make you a sadhu to serve me, but I want to teach you *brahmavidya,* which will enable you to attain Ekantik Dharma. I want to help you attain *moksha*. Through you, thousands will join Satsang. The Akshar Purushottam philosophy will spread throughout the world." Many parents realized the lofty ideals of Swamiji and willingly agreed to dedicate their beloved sons to the Sanstha and its noble task. A large group of highly educated young men was soon ready and eager for initiation into the sadhu-fold.

On 11 May 1961 (Vaishakh *vad* 12, V.S. 2017), the 70th birthday of Yogiji Maharaj, the spires of Gadhada mandir were fitted with golden *kalashes*. On this auspicious day Yogiji Maharaj initiated 51 educated youths into the sadhu-fold. After Bhagwan Swaminarayan, in the entire history of the Swaminarayan Sampraday and spirituality, it was the first time that 51 educated youths were being initiated

into the sadhu-fold. The credit goes wholly to Yogiji Maharaj. This occasion will be written in letters of gold in the annals of the Sanstha's history.

After this, many educated youths from India as well as England, Africa and other places approached Swamishri to be initiated as sadhus. This gave a great impetus to the Satsang. Later, these young sadhus trained and nurtured by Yogiji Maharaj from their pre-initiation days, toured throughout India and abroad to explain to people the true doctrine of Akshar and Purushottam. They totally dedicated themselves to the noble service of Yogiji Maharaj and the Satsang.

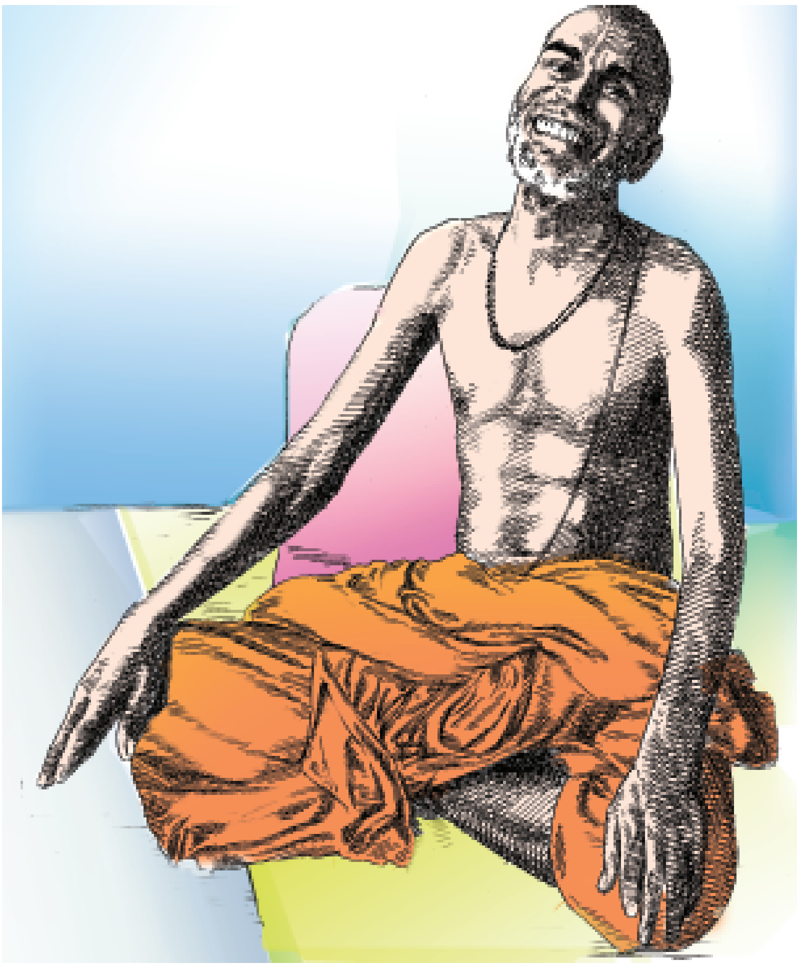
28 YOGIJI MAHARAJ'S LIFE-WORK

Yogiji Maharaj never tired in explaining the *upasana* of Akshar Purushottam to the world at large. He toured villages incessantly by day and by night. He would be in one village in the morning, and in the evening he would be in another. Wherever he went, he was warmly welcomed. Aspirants came in large numbers to seek his spiritual refuge and become his disciples. There was an unending series of celebrations, and *satsang* assemblies. The number of *satsangis* increased. Yogiji Maharaj started Satsang centres in many villages. He guided and encouraged the *satsangis* by writing to them regularly.

Accompanied by sadhus and devotees, he twice organized a special train pilgrimage of India. These pilgrim centres were further sanctified by the visits of Yogiji Maharaj, and many more aspirants were drawn towards Satsang. At his request the government built a platform at the railway station in Chhapaiya and named it 'Swaminarayan Chhapaiya'. A tremendous welcome was given to him when he arrived at Chhapaiya.

In recognition of Swamiji's great work, about 10,000 devotees came from all over to celebrate the sixty-fifth birthday of Yogiji Maharaj on 6 June 1956 (Vaishakh *vad* 12, V.S. 2012) at Sarangpur.

Yogiji Maharaj fulfilled the wish of his guru, Shastriji Maharaj, by consecrating a *hari* mandir at Akshar Bhavan, in Mumbai in 1962 (V.S. 2018). In the same year, he inspired a three-pinnacled *shikharbaddh*



Brahmaswarup Swami Shri Yogiji Maharaj

mandir in Ahmedabad (in the Shahibaug area), and consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam on 11 May 1962 (Vaishakh *sud* 7).

He also built a fine mandir at Mahelav, the birthplace of Shastriji Maharaj. In this mandir, besides the painted *murtis*, he also consecrated a marble *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj.

The year 1965 (V.S. 2021) marked the birth centenary of Shastriji Maharaj. Yogiji Maharaj was himself 73 years old, and was in very delicate health. Yet he visited 82 villages in 38 days, despite the biting cold of winter, to create awareness of and collect funds for the centenary celebrations. He was prepared to undergo any hardship to celebrate the centenary in a grand manner. On 6 February 1965 (Vasant Panchmi, V.S. 2021), at Atladra, the birth centenary of Shastriji Maharaj was celebrated with great joy and festivity in the presence of 150,000 devotees.

To promote character-based education amongst students, he established a students' hostel in Vidyanagar and a *gurukul* in Gondal in which primary and secondary education was given.

Thousands of devotees from India and abroad decided to celebrate the 75th birthday of Yogiji Maharaj (Amrut Mahotsav), through whom Shriji Maharaj was manifest on this earth, with due pomp and ceremony. A souvenir publication named *Amrutparva*, describing his glorious character and services, was published on this occasion. On this occasion Yogiji Maharaj presented a Rs. 25,000 donation to the Gujarat Government for feeding famine-stricken people. The 200,000 devotees who attended this celebration at Gondal spoke about the glory of his life and work.

Yogiji Maharaj himself laboured with the devotees to construct the Gunatitnagar Railway Station at Bhadra,

the birthplace of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. In Bhadra, Yogiji Maharaj built a marvellous single-spired *shikharbaddh* mandir over the birthplace of Gunatitanand Swami. In it, he consecrated the *murtis* of Dham (Gunatitanand Swami), Dhami (Bhagwan Swaminarayan) and Mukta (Gopalanand Swami) on 7 May 1969 (Vaishakh *sud* 6, V. S. 2025).

Vedras, a book containing Maharaj's teachings, was re-published at Yogiji Maharaj's request. He also prepared the biographies of his guru, Shastriji Maharaj and Bhagatji Maharaj (the guru of Shastriji Maharaj) for publication. On the occasion of Shastriji Maharaj's centenary celebrations a publication named *Yagnapurush Smruti* was released. The Harilila-kalpataru – a scripture inspired by Gunatit-anand Swami and written by Achintyanand Brahmachari – was also published through Yogiji Maharaj's initiative. Hindi and English publications on the life and work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan were published. Also, Hindi and English translations of the Vachanamrut were initiated by him. A biography of Gunatitanand Swami was also printed in Gujarati.

Yogiji Maharaj encouraged many devotees to read the *Swaminarayan Prakash,* the Sanstha's Gujarati monthly periodical. A weekly, named *Swaminarayan Satsang Patrika,* was also started to provide instructions and news regarding the Satsang to members in various centres, enabling them to conduct regular Sunday assemblies.

Yogiji Maharaj established a school for higher education in Sanskrit for the sadhus in Mumbai. By his blessings and guidance many sadhus became Shastris (BA) and Acharyas (MA) in Sanskrit. Some of the sadhus received government scholarships and doctorate degrees. Moreover, many young sadhus were also encouraged to

develop their various innate skills in music, art, writing, etc.

Yogiji Maharaj built many *hari* mandirs. He held *parayans* and *shibirs* by which thousands of devotees benefited from *satsang*. Many new devotees were attracted and the Satsang grew considerably.

What is remarkable about Yogiji Maharaj is that he was also highly respected by leaders of many different religions. They often approached him for guidance and blessings. They said, "Yogiji Maharaj belongs to all. He is not for the Swaminarayan Sampraday only, but for the whole world." The reason for this was that Yogiji Maharaj respected everyone. He never engaged in or allowed criticism of others. In India and Africa, Yogiji Maharaj visited, without any hesitation, Sikh gurudwaras, Jain *derasars,* Christian churches and other places of worship. He had great respect for all religions.

Today we see many leaders who allow relaxation or adjustment in their moral codes of conduct to attract more followers. lHowever, Yogiji Maharaj strictly observed eight-fold *brahmacharya* and the renunciation of wealth. He implicitly obeyed even the most minor commands of Shriji Maharaj.

He captured the hearts of all. And through his socio-spiritual works people looked up to him with reverence and respect.

29 VISITS TO AFRICA

Owing to the persistent requests of the devotees living in East Africa, Yogiji Maharaj visited East Africa and Aden for the first time in the year 1955 (V.S. 2012). He consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar Purushottam in the grand mandir at Mombasa. He consecrated Shriji Maharaj's sacred footprints at the memorial spot of Shri

Maganbhai, a respected veteran devotee, who had inspired many onto the spiritual path.

Yogiji Maharaj sanctified many places by celebrating festivals and holding spiritual assemblies. He travelled thousands of miles and spiritually uplifted many during his *satsang* tour of Africa. As a result of his visit many new centres for youths and elders were established. Their enthusiasm was sustained by his regular flow of letters to them. Later, the devotees built mandirs in Kampala, Jinja and Tororo, and requested Yogiji Maharaj to visit East Africa once again to perform the *murti-pratishtha* ceremonies in these mandirs.

So, once again Yogiji Maharaj visited East Africa and Aden in the year 1960 (V.S. 2016). He consecrated the *murtis* in the mandirs at Kampala, Jinja and Tororo. He travelled 35,000 miles, visiting 103 centres in seven different countries. Many new aspirants were drawn to the Satsang. The Satsang in Africa increased immensely.

In the West, too, centres were started in the UK, USA and Canada. Especially in the UK and USA, many aspirants embraced the Satsang.

In Africa, the devotees purchased large plots of land in Gulu and Nairobi and built huge mandirs. Again, the devotees appealed to Swamiji to visit them once more. Yogiji Maharaj, in spite of ill health, was moved by their devotion and agreed to visit East Africa for the third time.

In the year 1970 (V.S. 2026) he set forth on his third foreign tour. He consecrated the *murtis* in the mandir built on the main road in Nairobi. For the last time, Yogiji Maharaj gave the devotees much joy.

The devotees in London bought a church hall and converted it into a mandir. They invited Yogiji Maharaj to London to consecrate the *murtis* in the mandir. Pleased by their devotion, Yogiji Maharaj went to

London. He was given a festive welcome and was honoured with a procession accompanied by the RAF band through the main roads of the city. He performed the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the *murtis* in the mandir at Islington, in east London. During a ceremony on the river Thames in London the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj was bathed in the river.

After six weeks in London Yogiji Maharaj returned to India. He sent four sadhus to the USA to explain the message of Satsang.

30 RECEPTION AND DEPARTURE

Yogiji Maharaj's visit gave immense happiness and satisfaction to the devotees in Africa and England. He returned to India after spending a total of five months abroad. English, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and other newspapers in India commended his spiritual tour. Everywhere people sang his praises. He was given a grand reception in Mumbai at the Shanmukhanand Hall, the largest auditorium in Asia. He was felicitated for his work and achievements. Swami Chinmayanand who presided at the function said, "While Indian youths imitate Western culture, this great sadhu at the age of 80 went abroad to promote the Hindu Dharma. He deserves acclaim for imparting moral and spiritual values to all."

A public reception on the same scale was also accorded to him at Vadodara.

In Ahmedabad, then the capital of Gujarat, Yogiji Maharaj was taken in a grand procession through the main roads of the city. Yogiji Maharaj was the centre of attraction in the mile-long procession, where some five to six hundred thousand people turned up to have his darshan. In the city's Tagore Hall, the Chief Minister of

Gujarat, Shri Hitendrabhai Desai, and other ministers and spiritual heads paid their glowing respects and tributes to him. The Chief Minister, Shri Hitendrabhai Desai, said, "To honour Yogiji Maharaj is to honour a true adherent of Indian civilization. To honour Yogiji Maharaj is to honour the liberator of the whole of mankind. Today, we greet Yogiji Maharaj as the real giver of peace, one who dissolves the miseries caused by the many unpleasant incidents taking place in India and abroad."

He was given a rousing reception at many other places, such as, Limdi, Gadhada, Bhavnagar, Mahuva, Amreli, Rajkot and Gondal.

Despite all these honours, Yogiji Maharaj never forgot to offer devotion to his guru and his other duties. On his last visit to Sarangpur he performed *arti* of the golden *sinhasans* (in the mandir sanctum) prepared for Shriji Maharaj. This was a highly cherished desire of Shastriji Maharaj, and it was at last fulfilled.

Despite the heavy rains in Bhavnagar, he came out to lay the foundation stone of the new mandir. In Mahuva he performed the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony in the mandir built at the birthplace of Bhagatji Maharaj, who was the guru of Shastriji Maharaj.

He then went to Gondal, where he stayed for three months. During this period in Gondal on the auspicious occasion of Sharad Purnima, he consecrated a beautiful marble *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj placed on a fine marble platform behind the Akshar Deri. He stayed in Gondal and pleased everyone. He invited the devotees there, and showered his divine blessings upon them. He celebrated many small and big festivals, giving precious memories to the devotees.

Then, all of a sudden, he decided to invite illness. It is not always possible to understand the actions of

such godly sadhus. His illness worsened. Swami was immediately flown to Mumbai for further treatment. But, on 23 January 1971 (Posh *vad* 11, V.S. 2027) at 1.00 pm, he bid 'Jai Swaminarayan' to all, and left this world for Akshardham. The whole Satsang became overwhelmed with grief and shock.

His body was flown to Gondal. There, on 24 January 1971 (Posh *vad* 12) , after all the funeral rites were over, the body was cremated in the compound to the right of Akshar Mandir. Thousands of devotees from India and abroad offered their last tearful homage to Yogiji Maharaj.

To commemorate the spot where Yogiji Maharaj was cremated, Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired a memorial shrine called Yogi Smruti Mandir.

31 THE LIKINGS OF YOGIJI MAHARAJ

Yogiji Maharaj used to wear only coarse clothes throughout his life. He was very simple and liked to spend his time in service. He always ate simple food which he mixed in a wooden bowl and ate only after adding water to it. Whenever there was any special dish or if there were any sweet delicacies, he would fast on that day. He always had a smile on his face. He was at home with young and old alike, inquired about their welfare and blessed them all. He prayed to Shriji Maharaj that everyone be relieved of their miseries. He chanted the Swaminarayan Mahamantra constantly with a *mala* in his hand.

Yogiji Maharaj had a special bond with children. He affectionately called them to him and taught them to sing, "*Swami ane Narayan, Akshar ane Purushottam, Atma ane Paramatma, Brahman ane Parabrahman.*"

He often gathered the children around him and

taught them to sing bhajans, and to recite Swamini Vatus. He narrated stories from the life of Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami to point out a moral or teach truths to the children. He also narrated incidents from the lives of Shastriji Maharaj and Bhagatji Maharaj as illustrations of correct thought and conduct. He taught everyone how to perform puja and *arti* and gave them *prasad*.

Yogiji Maharaj instructed youths to rise early in the morning. After getting up he told them to first remember Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Then, after bathing, one should perform puja, offer prostrations, and read five verses from the Shikshapatri. After puja, one should do one's school work. School children should regularly study for four hours a day and college students for eight hours. Elders must always be shown due respect. Children should daily bow to their parents.

Before going to school or college, one must apply *tilak-chandlo* to one's forehead. Everybody should visit the mandir daily. They should attend the weekly assemblies without fail. They should commit to memory Swamini Vatu, Vachanamruts and kirtans. Milk and water should be filtered before drinking. One should fast on *ekadashi*. One should not steal, nor use another's materials without permission. One should not touch another's lost property. One should not smoke or tell lies. One should neither see films nor attend plays. One should not eat in hotels or in the bazaar.

32 SERMONS OF YOGIJI MAHARAJ

1. We should pray to God. While walking, eating, drinking or in any activity, we should remember God.
2. We should regularly read two Vachanamruts and ten Swamini Vatu.

3. Daily recite bhajans, Vachanamruts, Swamini Vatu, etc., which have been committed to memory.
4. When youths get together, they should not talk about worldly affairs, but should discuss religious matters. They should narrate and discuss the incidents of God and his holy Sadhu. They should recollect and ponder over what the Satpurush has discoursed.
5. Be committed to overcoming one's faults. Never lose one's temper. Always be honest with one's guru, then one can attain perfection by his blessings.
6. Those who acquire philosophical and religious knowledge and also do *seva* continue to progress. Therefore, always engage in service, big or small. Also develop a liking for religious discourses *(katha)*.
7. *Nanese ho nana rahie, jaisi nani dub,*
   Ghas phis sab ud gaya, dub khubki dub.
   "During floods big trees which stand high and erect are often washed away; however, the grass remains in its place in spite of the heavy water flow, because of its flexibility." Thus, harbouring ego will cause one misery in Satsang. It could even lead one to fall from Satsang. But if one humbly renders service, no matter how menial, then one does not become proud, and is able to uphold the *satsang*.
8. Youths should maintain unity (*samp*), friendship (*suhradaybhav*) and a sense of oneness (*ekta)* amongst themselves.
9. The whole Satsang should be regarded as divine. One must see divinity in all devotees. Our guru, through whom God manifests, should be realized as being perfect. Never speak ill of God or his devotees.
10. Youths should not make fun of others or indulge in mischief. They should always behave themselves.
11. One should not criticise the actions, forms (physical)

or faults of other people. One should analyse one's own actions and faults.

12. Tolerate physical and verbal hardships. Maharaj and the Satpurush are pleased with one who tolerates hardships patiently.
13. One should make do with what one gets, irrespective of its adequacy or quality. One should never quarrel for things.
14. Fire changes everything to its own colour, whereas water takes the colour of whatever is added or mixed with it. Similarly, we should be like fire and influence others for their good, but should not be influenced by another's vices or weaknesses, like water.
15. One should walk with one's eyes cast down. One should not be lured by the temptations in a city. Youths should therefore avoid sinful thoughts and visit the mandir daily. Develop love for Maharaj and the Satpurush, then despite living in the city, one will remain immune to temptations.
16. Saintly virtues should be cultivated. Evil habits prevalent in one's nature should be discarded. What is saintliness? Tolerance. One's behaviour must be such that it sets a good example for others.
17. The highest degree is to become the servant of a servant of God. So, serve devotees by washing utensils, washing their clothes, cleaning the latrines and the dining areas. Even if one becomes a big manager, one should serve. This is the way to *moksha*. So learn it.
18. Ahimsa and *brahmacharya* must be strictly observed. Believe one's *atma* as *gunatit, brahman, akshar*.
19. Three are eternal: Dham, Dhami and *mukta*. Shriji Maharaj – Purushottam, is the supreme incarnation.

He is the sole doer *(karta)*, has a form *(sakar)* and is the transcendental, supreme entity *(sarvopari)* who is ever present on earth *(pragat)*. Gunatitanand Swami, who is Aksharbrahman personified, is the divine abode of Shriji Maharaj, and the Satpurush is the gateway to Akshardham. One must have complete faith in these doctrines.

33 PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

In the year 1950 (V.S. 2006), Shastriji Maharaj appointed Shastri Narayanswarupdasji as the administrative head of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS). All the devotees were asked to work under his orders and guidance. He was only 28-years-old at the time. Since then, Shastri Narayanswarupdasji has been known by the name of Pramukh Swami.

Yogiji Maharaj, wrote about this incident in his diary as follows, “Swami (Shastriji Maharaj) looked at him, ‘I want to appoint only him as the President of the Sanstha.’ So, he was so appointed at a meeting in Ahmedabad. I was then sitting nearby. Swami told me, ‘Put your hand on his head and bless him so that he acquires your virtues.’ So I put my hand on his head, whereupon Shastriji Maharaj said, ‘You have placed your hands on his head, by which my hands are also included.’ In this way, Swamiji asked me to bless him, and when I did so, he became very happy.”

Since then, in accordance with the wishes of Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami has worked day and night to further the cause of the BAPS. Many sadhus and devotees celebrated the forty-eighth birthday of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Mumbai. On this occasion Yogiji Maharaj said, “Shastriji Maharaj was highly pleased

with him ever since his younger days and so appointed him as the president. How fast and how admirably he has developed the Sanstha! All should obey him implicitly. Pramukh Swami is the manifest form of Shastriji Maharaj. He is not at all different from him. Everyone should behold him with divine feelings. Seven hundred sadhus will be initiated. This task will be fulfilled by Pramukh Swami." Yogiji Maharaj thus revealed the glory of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

During his final illness Yogiji Maharaj had said, "Pramukh Swami is everything to me. All of you will now enjoy the bliss of God through him."

At present, our beloved guru is His Divine Holiness Swami Narayanswarupdasji – Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Let us please him and enjoy the bliss of Shriji Maharaj.

Ame sau Swāminā bālak...

Meaning:

We are the children of Swami; we will die for him. We are the youths of Shriji Maharaj; we will fight for him. We are fearless; we will not shirk sacrificing our lives, for we are born to die. We have launched this movement, and will undergo any suffering. We will sing the praises of Akshar-Purushottam. We are the sons of Shriji; we have our abode in Akshar. Dedicated as we are to *swadharma*, we have no apprehension whatsoever. Bhagwan Purushottam and Akshar, Gunatitanand Swami, are with us. We have accomplished our goal.

GLOSSARY

agna	instruction, order, command
akshar	in his personal form, Akshar serves Purushottam in his abode, Akshardham, and manifests as his ideal devotee, the Satpurush, on earth
amli-pipli	popular Indian game for children
arti	Hindu ritual of waving lighted wicks before the *murti* of God as an act of worship
asan	seat; one of the eight steps in yoga
asat	untruthful, false
atma	the pure *jiva* distinct from the physical, subtle and causal bodies – i.e., distinct from the *indriyas,* the *antahkaran,* worldly desires, or any other traces of *maya*
babul	medicinal stick used for brushing teeth

bhagwati diksha	initiation into the sadhu-fold
brahmacharya	Celibacy. For renunciants *brahmacharya* has been prescribed as eight-fold abstinence from associating with the opposite gender in the following ways: (1) *shravanam* – listening to or of (2) *keertanam* – talking to or of (3) *keli* – frolicking with (4) *prekshanam* – intentionally looking at (5) *guhyabhāshanam* – privately conversing with (6) *sankalpa* – fantasising about (7) *adhyavasāya* – thinking of (8) *kriyā* – intercourse with For householder males, *brahmacharya* constitutes renouncing all women except their wives, abstaining from sexual relations with one's wife on days of observance, and engaging in sexual relations with her only during the appropriate times
brahmavidya	spiritual knowledge
chandlo	auspicious vermillion mark applied on forehead
charnarvind	respectful term used to refer to the holy feet of God or other spiritually elevated person
cheshta	verses sung before bedtime describing the daily routine and glory of Shriji Maharaj

dal	spicy soup of dissolved pulses
derasar	Jain place of worship
divo	A lighted wick in an earthen or metal crucible filled with ghee
ekadashi	11th day of the bright and dark halves of a lunar month
ekta	unity
guna	quality, innate nature
gunatit	one who is above the three *gunas* of *rajas, tamas* and *sattva;* above *maya*
gurukul	residential school
indriya	sense, through which one can 'know' and perform actions
jalebi	a sweet delicacy
jiva	soul or self with worldly desires
kalash	sacred pot
kansar	a sweet delicacy
kanthi	double-threaded necklace, usually made of tulsi beads, received by *satsangis* upon initiation into the Satsang Fellowship, and worn as a sign of their affiliation to God
karta	doer. God is the cause of everything that happens
katha	spiritual discourse
kho-kho	popular Indian game
kothar	storeroom of a mandir
mahapuja	special worship offered to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand

	Swami, *muktas,* incarnations and deities
mala	rosary
maya	ignorance, material universe, darkness. One of the five eternal realities. Anything that deviates one from the worship of God
moksha	liberation; deliverance of the *jiva* from the cycle of births and deaths and attainment of God's divine abode
mukta	a liberated soul
murti	sacred icon of God that is worshipped
murti-pratishtha	traditional Vedic ceremony in which *murtis*, or images, are ritually consecrated in a mandir
niyam	moral and spiritual disciplines
pagh	turban
pan	made of *nagarvel* tree leaves and condiments
paramhansa	supreme swan. A male sadhu of the highest order, characterised by his ability to discriminate between *sat* and *asat* – just as swans were traditionally considered to be able to distinguish between milk mixed with water
parayan	spiritual discourses held for several days
parshad	a renunciant who wears white robes
parshad diksha	initiation into the monastic order in which the youth wears white robes
pradakshina	circumambulation
pragat	manifest

prasad	sanctified food, blessed and consecrated by having been offered to God
puri	a fried delicacy made of wheat flour
rajas	one of the three *gunas,* having attributes of: activity, restlessness, anger, violence, desire to satisfy the *indriyas* and extravagance
ras	a traditional folk dance of Gujarat
rotla	an unleavened bread
sakar	sugar crystals
samp	unity
sarvopari	supreme
sat	truth
sata	a sweet delicacy
Satsang	divine fellowship
satsang	the practice of spiritually associating with the Satpurush, fellow *satsangis,* one's own *atma* and the sacred scriptures of the Satsang fellowship
satsangi	a devotee who practices the vows of Satsang
sattva	second of the three *gunas,* having attributes of: clarity and purity of thought, excellence, mental poise
seva	service
shibir	conferences, training camps
shikharbaddh	mandir in which five *artis* are performed daily and daily worship is performed by sadhus
sinhasan	throne for *murtis* of God or Satpurush
sud	bright half of the lunar month

suhradaybhav	friendship
swadharma	one's own dharma
tamas	third of the three *gunas,* having attributes of: inactivity, lethargy, darkness and ignorance
thal	devotionally offering food to God
tilak	upright U-shaped mark imprinted on the forehead with sandalwood paste
tumbdi	gourd
upasana	sitting near, derived from 'upa' + verb-root 'as' – meaning to sit near. Philosophical framework outlining the fundamental principles of a doctrine. Philosophical understanding of the nature of God as well as the mode of worship of God, i.e., how one understands God to be like, and how one worships him
urdhvarekha	vertical line on the sole from the toe to the heel signifying spiritual greatness
vad	dark half of the lunar month
vartman	vow